(b) Heads of Mission are appointed keeping in view a wide range of qualities and qualifications which are not limited to the knowledge of languages alone. However, Tamil speaking officers have also been posted to Singapore and Malaysia on various occasions.

Seizure of Fishing Boats and Fishermen

2564. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have made any plans to discuss with Pakistani authorities the issue of seized fishing boats and arrested fishermen;

(b) whether Government have done any study of how many fishing vessels have been seized by neighbouring countries during the last two years;

(c) if so, the details of the findings of this study;

(d) what help is being given to the owners of such seized fishing vessels;

(e) whether any scheme would be drawn up to help the fishing sector meet the problems caused by neighbouring countries; and

(f) if so, the details of steps proposed in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir. Government is consistently taking up the issue of seized fishing boats and arrested fishermen through diplomatic channels, both in New Delhi and Islamabad, and during high level contacts from time to time.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Presently, there are about 198 Indian fishing boats in Pakistan and 75 fishing boats in Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, 2 Indian fishing boats are known to be detained.

(d) Nil

(e) and (f) The fishermen having mechanised boats of less than 20 metre length are helped by Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying through a centrally sponsored scheme on Safety of Fishermen at Sea under which the fishermen are provided with financial

assistance equal to 20% of the cost of Global Positioning System (GPS) and communication equipment. The upper ceiling of the financial assistance is Rs. 30,000/- per vessel. The fishermen are also facilitated to maintain communication with shore.

Indian fishermen detained in foreign jails

2565. SHRI THANGA TAMIL SELVAN:
SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of Indian fishermen languishing in the jails of foreign countries;

(b) the steps taken by the Government for their release; and

(c) whether Government are informed by the appropriate foreign Governments when Indian fishermen are apprehended and put in jail?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) There are 371 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails,none in Sri Lanka and about 6 fishermen in Bangladesh.

(b) The matters regarding release of Indian fishermen and their boats held in foreign countries are consistently taken up with Governents through diplomatic channels, both in New Delhi and the countries concerned, and during high level contacts from time to time.

(c) No, Sir. It takes some time to confirm the actual arrest of the fishermen by the Governments concerned. However, the Government of India on the basis of information available from the State Governments concerned, relatives of fishermen, fishermen associations and media reports etc. pursue the matter with the Governments concerned to confirm the arrest of Indian fishermen.

Indo-Iran Cooperation

2566. SHRI S. S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a joint declaration between India and the Islamic Republic